

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
THE REVEREND ROBERT L. HART

AUGUST 24, 1989

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY ANDREW DUNAR

ORAL HISTORY #1989-6

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3600-3602

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





Examiner photo

The Rev. Robert L. Hart, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, visited Bess Truman at her home during the past few years to give her communion. "She had a subtle sense of humor that you could miss if you didn't watch for it," he said. "Her eyes would light up when she was joking. There would be a sparkle in her eyes."

From appendix item 2, "Pastor pays special attention to spiritual needs," *The Examiner* (Independence, Mo.), Oct. 18, 1982

## **EDITORIAL NOTICE**

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Harry S Truman National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

The Reverend Robert L. Hart, Andrew Dunar, and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the interview, the transcription, and the final editing of this transcript.

## **RESTRICTION**

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, and photocopy this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the Superintendent, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

## **ABSTRACT**

The Reverend Robert L. Hart served as the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Independence, Missouri, from 1977 to 1983. As former pastor to Bess W. Truman, one of the church's most prominent members, Hart recalls visiting Mrs. Truman in her home and some details of her life in later years. The bulk of the interview relates to his involvement in the preparations for and then as the officiant of Mrs. Truman's funeral service at the church and at the Truman Library. Hart provides a glimpse of the personal, religious life of Mrs. Truman and the importance of church throughout her life. He also discusses the early movements to establish historical sites in Independence, including Trinity Episcopal Church, and how having the Trumans in the congregation affected the church through the years.

Persons mentioned: Bess W. Truman, Lady Bird Johnson, Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Rosalyn Carter, Valeria LaMere, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Margaret Truman Daniel, Benedict Zobrist, Clifton Daniel, Harry S Truman, Judy Lembcke, Pat Nixon, Betty Ford, Nancy Reagan, Ronald Reagan, Laura Frances Pendleton, Adelaide Twyman, Mary Shaw Branton, Patric Hutton, David Patrick, Jack Benny, Harry Lembcke, Arthur Vogel, Aaron Driver, Bruce Rahtjen, and Antonia Fraser.

# **ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH THE REVEREND ROBERT L. HART**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1989-6

ANDREW DUNAR: Today is August 24, 1989, and we're in the offices of the National Park Service at 223 North Main in Independence, Missouri, and we are interviewing this morning Reverend Robert Hart, who is the rector of . . . Rector, is that the correct title?

ROBERT L. HART: Yes.

DUNAR: . . . of Trinity Episcopal Church. Reverend Hart, can you tell us first maybe a little bit about your own background, about how you came to be rector of Trinity and about your first contact with Mrs. Truman?

HART: All right. I became rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Independence in November of 1977. Prior to that, I was one of the assistants at Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Kansas City. I came to Trinity Episcopal Church after my predecessor there died of a heart attack. He was about fifty-five years old. He, in fact, knew both the Trumans quite well and officiated at Mr. Truman's funeral. I was selected as rector by the vestry there and, as I say, began right at the end of the first week of November.

I waited a couple of months to make my first call on Mrs. Truman. Some people kind of sounded out for me exactly what they thought would be the best approach there, because, obviously, she was certainly my most famous parishioner. And I also knew she was beginning to be quite old, and I wanted to do the right thing by her and according to her wishes. And she let it be

known that she would like to see me. I think it was probably right after Christmas. She always liked to have a visit from her priest at that time. She wanted to receive communion at home. She no longer was getting out to church and hadn't for several years. And she liked to not only receive communion, but she also liked to just chat and have a good visit, and she always liked to have prayers for Harry. That was part of *every* visit, but particularly around the anniversary of his death and around his birthday. So those were important times for me to call on her. Depending on her own health and how strong she felt, I would go within a week either side of that anniversary somewhere, sometimes on the day itself, but she didn't always feel up to it on the day. So . . . and then I would see her during the year, about every two to three months, she would like for me to call on her and, again, she always would receive communion, we'd have a good talk, and we'd have prayers for Harry.

DUNAR: Would she initiate the visit or would you?

HART: No, I would initiate the visit. I would call the house. Occasionally, she would answer the phone herself. She was still answering the phone, even though she was already quite old at that time.

DUNAR: What was her health like when you first made contact with her?

HART: Well, she really was quite able to have a conversation, and she always looked good. Her speech was a little slow. I think there had been a series of small strokes or something—I wasn't entirely clear about that, but—so conversation was a little, a little slow. You didn't cover a lot of territory in an hour,

although her mind was bright and clear and her sense of humor was very much intact, as well as her, her kind of a . . . she had a kind of acerbic wit. She was a woman of strong opinions, and she wouldn't hesitate to say what she thought about a political figure, about anything.

DUNAR: Can you think of some examples?

HART: Oh, yes, oh, yes. She told me exactly how she felt about current presidents and first ladies and so forth. And the only ones that she really liked were the Fords, who were Republicans. And she didn't have much good to say about Republicans, ever, but she liked the Fords very much. And she liked Lady Bird Johnson. Lyndon was dead, so I didn't hear her talk about him all that much, but she stayed in touch, or Lady Bird Johnson stayed in touch with her, I should say. And she liked Lady Bird, felt close to her, I think. And, you know, I'm sure Mr. Truman and Lyndon Johnson were Democrats cut something from the same cloth. You know, they were that old, old line Southern Democrat and they knew and understood each other. I'm sure that's the basis of that friendship.

She was just really scathing about the Nixons and just could hardly talk about them. They were just [chuckling] just more than she could bear. But she didn't like the Carters either. [chuckling] And the Reagans, you know, they just were not on her list.

DUNAR: Why didn't she like the Carters? Do you know why?

HART: No, she didn't really tell me. You know, again, this was partly, I think, due to the fact that her speech was slow. She could tell me what she felt about these

people, but getting into a long conversation about why was taxing for her, I think, in some ways, and she may not have wanted to. But she certainly would deliver herself of her opinion, you know. And I think that certainly anyone who knew her over the years knew she was like that. I imagine the public didn't have a clue when she was in the White House as first lady, because she was so much in the background, just how outspoken and downright opinionated in some ways she could be.

DUNAR: Was she keeping up with current events? Did it seem like that?

HART: To a degree. Yes, I think so. One of the things she did a lot of was reading. Now, I don't know how much she stayed in touch with current events, but she did read a lot. When I would go down, there was a chair placed right in front of hers, which was in this front parlor there. I haven't been in the home since she died, but I saw a picture of that parlor once, as the park service has preserved it, and I think that chair is in exactly the same place as it, as it always was. I need to go over and sort of see for myself. One thing that is different is that there was always a great big stack of books right next to it and on the table next to the chair. She had her phone and her table and lamp right there.

DUNAR: We have a picture here of it. Maybe you can . . .

HART: Yes, I'm looking at a picture of that front parlor. This is the chair she sat in, and they would bring one of these chairs.

DUNAR: This is the chair then on the right side of the picture, as we're looking at it.

HART: That's right, as we're looking at it.



DUNAR: And she would have books sitting on the . . .

HART: Yes, here and on this table and on the floor, piled up underneath this table. And they'd pull a chair over and I'd sit right in front of her. Mysteries. Paperback mysteries and hardback mysteries just by the dozens. Mostly American mysteries, a few British mysteries. And I like murder mysteries myself, so we would talk about them. I prefer the British ones to the American ones, and she gave me several. I have some books that she gave me, and papers, and then all these . . . They're probably National Park Service publications of the first ladies and the presidents, they're . . . You could buy them—I've seen them—at the Truman Library. And she had a stack of those. I think she gave them away to visitors.

DUNAR: Oh, really?

HART: But I got my copy signed, so she would give it to me. [laughter] Yes, that's a good picture, too, because that's the, that's the `chair.

DUNAR: We're looking now at picture number 11 . . .

HART: 75, yes.

DUNAR: 1175.

HART: Yes, MO-1175 [MO-1175-081, see appendix, item 1].

MICHAEL SHAVER: This would be the northwest view of the living room.

HART: Yes.

DUNAR: Okay, northwest view of the living room.

HART: That's exactly the position. That's exactly the chair that she sat in. And as you know, this little bedroom off this way was where she stayed in her, yes, in her

final years.

DUNAR: So it was the one right off the living room, yes.

HART: This one, just off that front parlor.

SHAVER: I don't imagine it was configured that way when you were there.

HART: I think there was only one bed in there, as a matter of fact.

DUNAR: Was it a hospital bed? Is that right?

HART: It may have been. Or it may have been the one bed and a hospital bed. I was in there once or twice, but I can't remember for certain. But the furniture is . . . That's the furniture that was in there. And there was correspondence next to her. She was still able to write short notes. I own one or two myself that she wrote when I first knew her. Sign her name . . . And then, finally, she would only sign her name. And then after that, she stopped, it seemed to me that she stopped writing altogether towards the end.

DUNAR: Was it Valeria LaMere that would handle things like her correspondence?

HART: Yes.

DUNAR: And then when she was just signing her name, did Valeria handle the writing the note part?

HART: I think so. I think I have a note that Valeria LaMere has written, it seems to me, but that Mrs. Truman had dictated to her. And I'm sure that's who was doing it. And Valeria was often the one who answered the phone and would set up my visits. I would have to . . . They would contact Secret Service, and I would show up at the front gate and the Secret Service would, you know, electronically open the gate for me. I'd just kind of wave at them across the

street, and they would let me in. Only once did I stand out there and I couldn't get their attention. I don't know whether someone disappeared from the front window [laughter]. They wouldn't like to hear that, I know. So, I went up to the front door of their house and knocked on the door, and that was really upsetting to them. I'm sure I wasn't supposed to be there at all, but I just . . . I wanted in [laughter], and I couldn't get anybody to let me in. But the Secret Service were always very polite, very cooperative, very nice people, and I, you know, enjoyed getting to know them. When Mrs. Truman was in the hospital I would visit her, and there were always Secret Service outside her room, of course. She was always at Research Hospital, and I would call on her there when . . . the times that she was in the hospital. It seems to me—I may be wrong about that—but about once a year she had to go in for a short stay.

DUNAR: Were those, do you know, for just routine checkups? Or were they bad situations?

HART: She usually wasn't . . . A couple of times it was a crisis or she just wasn't doing very well. You know, they were so close about information like that. Even though I was her parish priest, I had a difficult time getting in. Mrs. Truman would tell me, but if she couldn't talk to me—because the orders were, “Don't tell anybody”—they wouldn't even tell me. So I would . . . But I had the right to show up and just visit, so I would exercise that. Try and find out for myself exactly what was going on and the state of her health.

DUNAR: Were there any members of her household staff that would accompany her to the hospital?

HART: I don't remember that being the case, I really don't, at least in the years that I knew her.

DUNAR: You had mentioned a little bit just before we started about the fact that she could be very blunt. I wonder if you could give some examples.

HART: Well, just the way she rendered her opinions about presidents and first ladies would be very blunt, you know. I can't remember her exact words, but she was just completely straightforward. A story she told me: Alice Roosevelt Longworth died, and I always tried to come with some piece of information or something as a conversation starter. Because as I say, her conversation was slow and I wanted to kind of stimulate her so we could just talk. Besides, I wanted to hear what she had to say about the things that she, she knew and had experienced. And I said, "Mrs. Truman, did you hear that Alice Roosevelt Longworth died?" She said, "Oh, yes." She said, "I sat next to her at dinner just after Harry became president. And she leaned over during dinner and said to me, 'Thank God you're not Eleanor.'" [laughter]

DUNAR: That's good.

HART: And there again, I don't . . . and ten-to-one, no one else has ever heard that story, so I've preserved that one. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Was her reaction to political figures, which you mentioned could be very strong, was it based do you think on policy or strictly on the individual's personality and what they were like as people?

HART: Oh, hard to tell, I think. I think it was both. I'm not sure she could separate the two. But political feelings were very strong in her, and they probably crossed

over the border sometimes into personal feelings. I imagine, though, when she had to, she could be very gracious. I know President Carter came to visit her, and I'm sure she was gracious, although she didn't have much good to say about . . . about them. But that's the way she was, a woman of strong opinions. I once asked her about the world's fair in St. Louis, because they were celebrating that in St. Louis, and so I talked to her about it, and there was a lot in the newspaper about it at the time. And I believe she was eighteen years old when the St. Louis World's Fair was going on and she talked about going over there with some of her younger cousins to St. Louis to see it and what a wonderful time she'd had at the St. Louis World's Fair. She was a living link with another era entirely.

DUNAR: Did she ever talk at any length at all about any of the early days?

HART: Just every so often an occasional mention. She talked about a terribly cold winter, and I think it might have been 1917. I am not for certain. But in cold winters they would put boards above the stairwell at the second floor and close it off entirely, so that the heat would not rise up to the second floor, and they would live on the first floor. She talked a little bit about the influenza, that sort of 1917-1919 period when the influenza outbreak killed so many people.

DUNAR: She was quite ill during that. Did she talk to you about that at all?

HART: Yes. I think she mentioned it, but she didn't talk about it. You know, there again, she wouldn't get into extended discussions of that because it was difficult for her to talk. I'm trying to think, I don't think of too much about the early days that she . . . She would talk a little bit about her mother, but I don't

remember anything too specific about that.

DUNAR: Did she talk much about President Truman?

HART: Well, she would, she would mention him almost every time I was there. And the thing that I remember about that is how much she loved him, how good-looking he was, she felt, and I think she was trying to tell me how much she missed him. She seemed very, very tender about his memory, and I think she was very lonely. By this time, there were very few of her old friends still alive, and what few there were didn't call much anymore because they weren't in much better condition than she. And . . . she was lonely, and, yet, her mind was still very lively and very . . . very quick.

DUNAR: Did Margaret Truman visit at all, at any point when you were over there?

HART: Yes, she did. I don't know how many times Margaret was in town, because that . . . I have a feeling that wasn't always public information. Sometimes it would make the papers, and sometimes I knew about it. One time I had a conversation with Margaret.

Within the first two years I was rector of the church, I became very concerned that Mrs. Truman would die—and given her age and condition, she could have died at any minute—without any plans for her funeral. And I could discover none and the library had none, other than she was to be buried, they thought, in the courtyard. With conversations with Benedict Zobrist and others, we decided the proper approach was for me to raise the issue with Margaret's husband and have him bring it up with her. Mrs. Truman never brought it up with me. I was hoping she would say something about what she

wanted, but she never did.

So, one time when Margaret was in town, she came over to see me at the church, and we sat down, and we sketched out the basics about what the funeral was to be like. And when Mrs. Truman died, that is what we went on and pretty much held to. Margaret and Clifton were in Europe when Mrs. Truman died. I got a phone call at about seven o'clock in the morning the day she died, which, I believe, is the eighteenth of October. By the way, in some publication I saw her death date listed, and it was actually the date of her funeral that was in it. I don't know whether that's . . .

DUNAR: I think that's actually in Margaret's biography.

HART: Yes, that's where I saw it, and it's wrong.

DUNAR: Yes, it's listed wrong.

HART: Certainly a date that I'll never forget. Any rate, I began planning the funeral, what I could do without Margaret being in town, on the basis of the notes that she had given me. As I remember our conversation, she simply told me it was to be a simple, straightforward burial service from the *Book of Common Prayer*. No eulogy. I said maybe two paragraphs at her funeral, and then we were to proceed to the Truman Library where she was to be interred. And that, apart from just the enormous amount of detail of who was to come and who was to be admitted to the funeral and so forth, and those kinds of security arrangements and other things, we adhered to Margaret's wishes for the funeral.

DUNAR: Was that generally then about the only guidelines that Margaret gave you, in

terms of keeping it simple?

HART: Yes, yes. It was not to be a state funeral because she was first lady. She wasn't president. There was no reason for a state funeral. I don't think one would have been appropriate even, or probably the government wouldn't have done one. Harry had planned a state funeral for himself, and Margaret cut out a lot of what Harry had asked to be . . . Judy Lembke can tell you more about that.

DUNAR: Yes. The army, I think, had plans for a lavish funeral in Washington, didn't they?

HART: Yes, all sorts of things were planned. The book was about this thick, and Judy Lembke may have it. You all may have it, too. She can tell you more about what happened, but a lot of that was simplified by Margaret's own . . . Margaret's like her mother: she's straightforward, and she has definite ideas. But we cooperated on this issue very easily. There was no problem at all.

DUNAR: Wasn't there a controversy over Mrs. Carter coming to the funeral? Was that an issue you remember?

HART: The only controversy I remember is sitting around the dining room table in the Truman home with Margaret really not wanting to ask Pat Nixon at all. And I don't know how she handled that. I think it was probably true of Rosalyn Carter, as well. I think, yes, Rosalyn Carter invited herself.

DUNAR: That's what I thought.

HART: Yes, that's right, she did. That brings that back to mind. She said she was coming and, of course, that was that. And Betty Ford came and, of course, Mrs. Reagan. That was kind of a . . . not exactly last minute, but it took a



while before we knew whether it was going to be Mrs. Reagan, or Mrs. Reagan and Mr. Reagan, or just what, but in the end, it was Mrs. Reagan. Lady Bird Johnson was coming, and one of her daughters became ill and she didn't come. So there almost were four first ladies, but in the end there were three. Every time one of them announced she was coming, the security precautions rose exponentially, and then when Mrs. Reagan said she was coming, it was sort of out of hand. [laughter]

DUNAR: Was it difficult to reconcile the religious aspect of the ceremony with the security precautions?

HART: Well, not exactly. The security precautions made it difficult a little bit to use the church freely, as I was used to using it. I couldn't park in my own parking space. I drove into the parking lot before the funeral and was chased out by the [chuckling] security people, you know. And no matter what I said, you know, that this was my church and I was going to perform the funeral, but no. No go, you know. [chuckling] I had to park across the street. And I had to prepare a list of people who were there to help me with the funeral, because I had to get the organist in and I had to get people like that . . . I had to get my secretary into the funeral. And then Benedict Zobrist and his secretary were to check the peoples' invitations as they came in, and the funeral had to be by invitation only. The church is small and seats about 150. So that had to be thought through very carefully, who was invited.

DUNAR: Who took care of that part of it?

HART: Primarily, Margaret did. I made a few suggestions, which she . . . I think, at

first a little reluctantly, but, you know, Clifton was sitting there, and he was keeping things kind of calm the whole time. The suggestions I had to make, which I tried to do in as polite a way as I could, had to do with old people in Independence, older women that had known her and had bothered to stay in touch with her over the years. And I simply brought up their names, and I might get a scowl from Margaret, but she would put their name down. She did. There were just two or three of those people.

DUNAR: Do you remember who they were?

HART: Laura Frances Pendleton. Adelaide Twyman was probably one, but she couldn't come. I know she was virtually bedridden at that time. I'll think about that and see if I can remember any others. Probably were a couple of others.

Benedict Zobrist and his secretary, as I said, were to check the invitations as people arrived. I had forgotten to put his name down on my list of people who were to arrive early and to help me, and I had to straighten that out with the Secret Service and the police and all. Of all people, you know. [chuckling] Almost chased away.

There were helicopters flying overhead and they had the bomb . . . You know, the dogs that sniff for bombs came in and sniffed the church from top to bottom, and that sort of thing went on.

DUNAR: Was this then considered under the jurisdiction of the Secret Service or the Independence police?

HART: Both, I think. Both were there.

DUNAR: They had to coordinate with each other?

HART: Yes, both cooperated with each other. A man here in Independence who used to install the phones, I think he installed the phones—here—for that occasion and all the different phone lines that had to be installed to the Independence police and everything else for that occasion, and others, too. There is a funny story that has to do with the first ladies, which I think has to be recorded.

SHAVER: Let's take a break before we get into that.

HART: All right.

[End #3600; Begin #3601]

DUNAR: Okay, you said there was a first lady story?

HART: Yes, I have a first lady story that has to do with Mrs. Truman's funeral. The first ladies, because of the security precautions and all, were not to enter through the front west door of the church. They were to come in through the parish hall, into the parish hall, through my secretary's office into my office, which also had a back door. And they would go through that back door, out of my office, into a hallway and into a side door into the church itself, a side door by the organ, I believe. In any case, I had set my office up so that it would be a kind of holding room until the three first ladies were there, and then they could enter together. That was the plan.

So, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Ford arrived before Mrs. Reagan. They arrived separately but early. And they were . . . I greeted them. They went into my office and waited there. I did not go in there with them, just left them in there. Before Mrs. Reagan arrived, arrived just before the funeral was to begin

or fairly close to the time, I can't remember who—I think it was probably Secret Service or someone—went in and escorted Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Ford into the church and sat them in the front pew on the north side where they were to be seated. That was not exactly according to plan because I thought we were to wait till Mrs. Reagan arrived.

Well, she arrived just shortly thereafter with this flying wedge of motorcycles and helicopters and so forth. Pulled up to the back of the church. She came through. She nodded at me. She didn't bother to greet me, and went in with three or four Secret Service men surrounding her into my secretary's office, which was a small office. The door to my office was closed—she couldn't see into it—and they stopped. And the Secret Service were all gathered around her.

I could see into this office, I was standing in the parish hall, but I couldn't understand why she didn't go on into my office or, or something happened, you know. So they were just standing there, and I waited a few minutes. I thought, you know, who am I to presume to intervene? Certainly, they know what is to happen. And I went towards the secretary's office, finally. I thought, well, it's time for me to see what's going on. I'm in charge of this funeral, and so someone has got to take charge at this moment and see that things happen. And just as I got to the door, here Mrs. Reagan was with her one foot up on a chair, with her dress pulled up, adjusting her stockings. The Secret Service men were all looking out the window or in different directions. My secretary was plastered up against the wall, trying to look like

the wall. I quickly turned around and went the other direction and waited for this little scene to conclude. And as soon as it did, instead of going through my office, she went out, back out into the parish hall and went that way, down the hallway and into the church.

DUNAR: So she could make an entrance?

HART: Well, I didn't know why she didn't go . . . She didn't make any more of an entrance than the other two first ladies, except for the fact she entered by herself. She entered the church by herself. After the funeral was over, I asked my secretary what was going in there, except for the fact she had to adjust her stocking [chuckling] you know. I got a glimpse of the first lady's legs. I don't know how this is going to look in print, [laughter] but here it is for history [laughter] and all time. And she said, "Well, from what I could understand of the conversation, she didn't want to go into your office because she thought the other two first ladies were in there, and she did not want to be with them."

DUNAR: Oh, really?

HART: Of course, she had to sit next to them in church, but that doesn't mean she had to speak to them, I guess. I don't know. So I gather that, from what my secretary could gather from the conversation, that she thought they might be in there, and she didn't want to be with them. Now, you know, there were supposedly feelings between the Carters and the Reagans, so . . . and I don't know how she felt about Betty Ford, but that's the story. That's the story. Otherwise, they all behaved themselves very well. [laughter]

They sat . . . the famous picture of them, I think at least it was kind of

famous at the time of the funeral, them sitting in the front pew in the church . . . And then there's another one, graveside, you can see them together. That one was on the front page of the *New York Times* and other places, too.

DUNAR: Did the media at all intrude on this? Or to what extent? [laughter]

HART: Yes. How do you keep them away? Per Margaret's wishes, and my own, too, they were not allowed in the church for the funeral. They were briefly allowed in as soon as the first ladies were seated. They rushed in and took those pictures. That was a little, oh, awkward and even a little ugly, as those things always are, because they just kind of thunder in in this herd, and they all jam in front of these people, and flashbulbs going off. And it was a church, and there was Mrs. Truman's body, you know. You don't like that, but that was the one concession that was made. I didn't have much to do with that. That was a decision of the family. They were not allowed in the church. They were allowed across the street from the church.

And the way the funeral was conducted, I went out a side door with an acolyte who was carrying a processional cross, and we went in front of the church and met the hearse with the body and the family, and we . . . then we led the family and the casket into the church so they could photograph all of that. They were up on scaffolding, so they could see all of that. The funeral only lasted probably twenty-five minutes. And as we came out, they could photograph all of that on TV and so forth. And there was a small crowd across from the church, not a large one. And then they could photograph a little of the procession to the Truman Library. And then the cameras were on the roof of

the Truman Library, not down in the courtyard with us, and so they could photograph the committal service from the roof. And I think they, some of them tried to record that. There might be a recording of that part of it.

DUNAR: Was the courtyard entirely enclosed? Or was there an open side, yet, at the time?

HART: No, it was enclosed by that time.

DUNAR: It was enclosed entirely at that time, okay.

HART: By that time it was entirely enclosed. And it was a beautiful day, too, absolutely perfect weather.

DUNAR: Did you enter the courtyard then through the same entrance that now is the visitor entrance?

HART: Yes, it's that east entrance, I believe. Yes, that's the way we entered, and we came through there. The family was already seated . . . Let's see, no, the first ladies and the visitors were seated already. The family followed. Again, the acolyte carrying the processional cross and me and the casket, they followed behind it right into the courtyard. And then the committal service from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

DUNAR: Were there any . . . I would imagine there would be less questions about how that would happen there than there would be in the church, concerning the church part of the ceremony. Is that correct?

HART: Well, by questions, do you mean by how it was done?

DUNAR: Anything concerning protocol or anything of that sort?

HART: Oh, protocol was pretty much the way I would have expected it to go at a

funeral, any funeral. The family was seated on one side of the casket, the guests were on the other.

DUNAR: And the same people that were in the church then were at the grave site?

HART: They were at the grave side. It was a private funeral, so the religious side of it predominated throughout. There was . . . I called the shots on that, and no one ever questioned me about it, at all.

DUNAR: You had more control then there than you did at the church?

HART: Well, as far as the service itself, I had absolute control over that. I consulted with the family about which scripture readings were to be used. Two of Margaret's sons read two of the three readings. As far as exercising any of the options from the burial service in the *Book of Common Prayer*, I made all the decisions about that, and it was a straightforward service. I mean, I was pretty much told I was in charge, and so I felt that, so that this thing would not get out of hand, given all of the interested parties and the kind of people I was dealing with who were really used to calling the shots in their own sphere of life, I decided that I would call the shots. And, pretty much, given the parameters, which were fairly normal, I did that. And the day went very smoothly. The Truman Library staff really deserves a great deal of credit for that. She died on a Monday and was buried on a . . . Let's see, was it a Thursday? It was the twenty-first, wasn't it? Twenty-second or twenty-first?

DUNAR: I'm not certain of that date.

HART: Yes, I'll have to think about that. In any case, it took . . . That whole week was dedicated to that funeral, in my life. From early Monday morning until the



funeral was over, from the eighteenth on, I dealt with nothing else. I had to . . . We worked on the guest list. We worked on press releases. I had to give interviews. We had to go over and over the details of every minute of the thing, and I didn't have time to do anything else but that.

DUNAR: Did you meet with members of the family after the funeral?

HART: There was a reception in the Truman Library after the funeral. I was able to speak with the family there, and then I had one other brief time with Margaret and Clifton, oh, a day or two after the funeral.

DUNAR: Have you seen them at all since?

HART: Yes, I have. I've seen Margaret since then two or three times. For a year or two after that, I was still taking part in Truman Library functions. When they give the annual scholarships in the spring, I would come out and do the prayers at that particular presentation. I did the graveside prayers, oh, around Truman's birthday for a year or two after the funeral. I left Independence and was no longer rector there and my successor took over some of those functions. But I did see Margaret at least two or three times after that. She and I got along very well, and I really admire her and like her. I can see a lot of her mother in her. I admire her book about her mother because it dealt with a lot of the difficult issues that I had always wondered about. Margaret and I have a mutual friend in "Shawsie," Mary Shaw Branton, who is a parishioner now at the cathedral where I am in Kansas City, so we have kind of stayed in touch through that connection as well. But the funeral was certainly one of the biggest events in my life, and dealing with people from Truman's cabinet and

people who had been famous in government and American history.

DUNAR: Can you recall any incidents of any meetings that you had during that time with some of those individuals?

HART: Well, I had several but they were usually informal situations or very brief. They would bring in Truman cabinet members to speak at this scholarship presentation, for instance, and I would meet them. But I don't have any real stories to tell about those people. It certainly was a great honor to meet them, but I don't have any kind of recollections that would be worth recording, other than the fact that I met them. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Right, right. Could you comment a little bit about the impact on the church of this association with the Trumans over the years?

HART: Well, that's an interesting story, and there are still several priests around who can tell you about different phases of that involvement. Father Patric Hutton is retired. He is now living here in Kansas City, and he married Margaret and Clifton. He officiated at their marriage. He has a brain tumor, and his health is slipping, but he could still tell you stories. Father David Patrick is retired and in Joplin, Missouri. He was rector here four or five years in the early fifties and he knew Harry and Bess quite well right at the time that Harry just was leaving the presidency, and visited with them at a time in their lives when they had a lot . . . you know, were still very healthy, and he could tell you stories.

But Mrs. Truman's family was Presbyterian. She became Episcopalian when she was in her late teens—I think it was about eighteen. Interestingly enough, the date of her confirmation in the parish register is Harry Truman's

birthday, which is just an interesting coincidence that I picked up looking through the parish register once. Her brother sang in the choir there and she remained . . . In the minutes of various vestry meetings and so forth, you can see Bess Truman's name appearing way back in the early days, in the 1920s when she was first getting involved there. Her impact then, of course, would have been just as another parishioner. I think she was active.

There was a time when the church went on . . . it was kind of hard times. In fact, the rector who married them, I think, had some kind of mental problem. She didn't get along with him, and no one else seemed to. And after he left, the church for several years was kind of half operating. But she remained loyal to the church, and when it got back on its feet in the early 1930s she was very active.

Harry never was a member. He described himself as a "drinking Baptist." He would occasionally go to the Baptist church, but he would also come to church with Mrs. Truman. And as soon as he was involved in national politics, elected a senator and so forth, their involvement in the church began to kind of bring a little bit of a spotlight on the church and a little bit of recognition because of her involvement there. She was a member of the Altar Guild. One woman, older woman in the parish remembers her polishing the brass and the silver with a pair of Harry Truman's old undershorts. [laughter] I was told that story several times. She never wanted to be treated any differently than anybody else, and, by and large, she wasn't. The plaque on the wall to her memory in the church is right opposite the pew that she always sat

in, so that's the reason it's where it is in the church. [see appendix, item 2]

They gave some interesting objects to the church. One large handmade cabinet with an early television set and a radio and old record player in it that I think Jack Benny had given President Truman. That's still over there. It's still called . . . I don't know, the Truman Television Set or Record Player or something. [chuckling] And it's still over at the church; you can see it. [see appendix, item 3] And there were a couple of other things.

DUNAR: Did she attend services regularly?

HART: Yes, when she was in town she did. After he was elected senator, she wasn't, of course, always in Independence, but she spent probably more time in Independence than Washington, if you read the memoirs correctly. [chuckling] And she did attend church regularly. Margaret sang in the choir there. And a little bit of national recognition that it drew . . . One time when he was president, the Christmas services were broadcast, I believe, nationally from Trinity Church. And there are pictures of that in the archives of the church, photographs of it. Margaret's wedding drew attention to the church. And, of course, her funeral. Mr. Truman's funeral was not at the church. The funeral took place at Truman Library but the rector, Harry Lembke, officiated at the service and was the principal officiant. It was . . . There is some confusion about that occasionally in peoples' memories and occasionally you see it written. I've seen once someone saying a Presbyterian minister, sometimes the Baptist minister. The Baptist minister, I believe, offered a prayer, but the service was conducted by Harry Lembke, the rector of Trinity Episcopal

Church. And you can see his picture on the wall at the Truman Library officiating at the funeral. People seem to know that little church because of the Trumans. You'll go all over the country and . . . Our former bishop Arthur Vogel used to say, "Well, you know, people mention that little church to me everywhere I go because, just because of the Trumans, and they know about it."

DUNAR: Were there any questions about expansion at any point? It seems that must have come up. I imagine with more attention being focused on the church, did the congregation grow and was there ever a question of expanding the church?

HART: Well, they did build the entire parish hall, which houses the educational wing and the offices and everything, in the early, the mid-1950s. I don't know whether you can credit that to the Trumans, but the church did grow and they did add that wing on. That was in the time of Father Patric Hutton, and Harry Truman gave the dedicatory address when that part of the building was dedicated. He occasionally would address a men's group that met there for breakfast.

DUNAR: We were talking just before, and Mike said that he thought that he remembered an article that he saw about a reunion of the former rectors of Trinity Church a few years ago.

HART: Yes. Yes, and we all swapped Truman stories, too.

DUNAR: Do you remember some of those that particularly stick in your mind?

HART: Oh, gee. No, they really don't. There was a couple of good ones, though, and I think that you ought to get to Father Patric Hutton right away, given the

condition of his health, and talk to Father David Patrick down in Joplin. I can give you those addresses, if you just call my office. But they were all there. And Father Aaron Driver has a couple of memories 'cause he really got the church on its feet in the early 1930s. And he's retired and living out in California, I think, and he was back. He was by far and away the one that went the furthest back in kind of the corporate memory of the parish. There were only two or three people who were even around when he was there. But those of us living were all there for that reunion, which was about three or four years ago now. In fact, the current rector, Bruce Rahtjen, asked us to tell a Truman story, because all of us had had some involvement, you know. So we did.

DUNAR: Right, right. Was the church . . . During the time that you were rector, there was a bit of a preservation movement in the Truman Historic District, I guess it was called.

HART: Yes.

DUNAR: Was the church involved in that at all?

HART: Yes. When I came there as rector, they were just finishing all the paperwork on their designation as a national historic . . . Was it building or site?

DUNAR: Site, yes.

HART: Site is the correct terminology. And so we got our plaque to put on the front of the church. There is, of course, an historical marker in front of the church as well. And just prior to my coming, during one of the big historic homes tours in Independence, they had done a . . . had the church open and people dressed in replicas of the bridesmaids' dresses that were worn at Mrs. Truman's

[wedding], and a replica of her dress, the one . . . it's the picture, the blowup right out in the hall here. The church may still have a replica of her dress, which someone made. And we gave tours of the church, and that occurred also once during, or twice during my time as rector and has occurred since during one of the homes tours or something. The church was open, we brought people in, we let them see photographs of things having to do with the Trumans that are in our archives over there. And we have a copy of this wedding photo out here in the hall. We had the parish register showing their wedding, you know, their signatures in the register for their wedding, and things like that. And there has always been a concern that the church itself, the church part of it, be preserved and be kept up. And it is. It's kept up very nicely. Because it has this connection, with the history of Independence, as well, because the building is over a hundred years old. We celebrated the centennial of the building while I was rector. And then the connection with the Trumans we feel is important.

DUNAR: There was during a time, I think, a controversy over the question of the, I think, Baptist church concerning building more parking spaces. And there was quite a controversy . . .

HART: Well, there was controversy over the building of the new church building itself.

DUNAR: Oh, with that? Was your church involved at all in any of that? Were you involved at all in the question of evaluating what would be considered to be a historic structure or . . .

HART: They built that new church building just after I left, and the current rector,

Bruce Rahtjen, I think, did have some involvement in that controversy. You could ask him about that if you want to. I'm sure there were a lot of opinions around the church about that, but I couldn't. I was gone. In fact, the real concern over the Truman Historic District, I think, arose right after Mrs. Truman's death, in the years following her death. I left Trinity Church about eight months after she died, so some of that controversy has arisen since I left.

DUNAR: Are there parishioners at Trinity that were particularly close to the Trumans that you might suggest that we contact? You mentioned a few people already. Are there any others, do you think?

HART: Yes, I mentioned two. I don't know, I think Adelaide Twyman has died, and I don't know about Laura Frances Pendleton. She would be quite old. Let me think. There are probably a couple of people, and I will check on the names. I've got to call them back into memory, and I will let you know about them if there's someone I think that's still alive that you ought to talk to. Certainly, Judy Lembke, I'll say that again.

DUNAR: In your contacts with Mrs. Truman in her last few years, who seemed to you, to be the perhaps, the closest people to her?

HART: Well, it would be hard to say because some of her . . . She had some buddies in town that she would see, but—Laura Frances was one of them—and I don't think they were able to come by very often any more. I don't think she saw too many people. She went to the hairdresser's occasionally, and Valeria LaMere would take her occasionally to the grocery store, even, the first two or three years that I knew her. That's the only getting out she did, and I don't know



who else saw her during that time, really.

DUNAR: Did she ever . . . ?

HART: Judy Lembke used to go by with her daughter to see her. She was still staying in touch. There might have been one or two others. You've probably interviewed Valeria. I would think she would remember who those people were.

DUNAR: [unintelligible] Did she ever express any regrets about not being able to get out and wanting to get out?

HART: Well, she would say she was sorry she couldn't go to church and things like that to me. Beyond that, not so much. No.

DUNAR: You mentioned at the outset that you knew some anecdotes. You've mentioned several already, of course. Are there any others that you might want to get . . .

HART: I'm not sure that I remember any others. Little things that I would say . . . At Christmas time there would be lots of plants, poinsettias and so forth, and I would just say things like, oh, "That's a beautiful plant, Mrs. Truman." I was really curious where all these were coming from because it was interesting to me. And she would say things like, "Well, Lady Bird sent me that one," and so forth, so I kind of knew from that who she was in touch with. And it was really former cabinet people and people like Lady Bird Johnson who would send her flowers at Christmas.

DUNAR: There were a few people that had been in touch with the Trumans, I think, through the years. I wonder if maybe you . . . ever meet John Snyder?

HART: Yes, oh, yes. Certainly, I knew John Snyder.

DUNAR: What was the nature of their relationship in the last, you know, the last years?

HART: I wasn't around when and if he called on her. And so, I really don't know.

DUNAR: Yeah, you had contact with him mostly through the Truman Scholarship fund?

HART: Yes through the . . . yeah, through the things that went on at the Truman Library. I was never . . . never was there with anyone else. A couple of times I brought my wife with me, and that was it. You know, Valeria was around, but no one else.

DUNAR: Were there other members of the Truman official family in addition to John Snyder, maybe. I know he made a special attempt to keep in touch with Mrs. Truman. Were there any others who . . . ?

SHAVER: Can we take a break?

DUNAR: Sure.

HART: I'm gonna have to leave in probably about another ten minutes.

DUNAR: Okay.

HART: I got a lot more to tell you anyways.

SHAVER: Did she ever, just to be thinking about it, I'll ask you now, [unintelligible] so we have it out of the way. Did she ever talk about the circumstances surrounding her conversion to the Episcopal church to you?

HART: Not to me personally. I can tell you what I think I know about that.

SHAVER: Was she more or less . . . Was she trying to keep up with the affairs of the church to the extent possible that she could? Any programs or fundraisers or activities . . . [unintelligible] I would like . . . give us your meeting at the

dining room table with Margaret. If you think you can recall that.

[End #3601; Begin #3602]

HART: Oh, gee. I probably should have kept a diary, you know, and I was so busy I didn't. I could have kept details of all the . . . like who was there, but I . . . Which question do you want me to answer first?

DUNAR: Well, why don't you go ahead with the question about the dining room.

HART: Okay, we're talking about the meeting around the dining room table at the Truman home with Margaret and Clifton, after Mrs. Truman died. Needless to say, you know, I had some apprehensions about that because I wanted to get my two cents in just like everyone else did, and I really wanted to . . . I really felt that I didn't want quick decisions made which would later be regretted, and I felt like, that Margaret might have a tendency to do that. But Clifton was a very steadying influence throughout that meeting and everyone was behaving very well, really. Benedict Zobrist was there and, as I remember, a local police chief or something, somebody like that perhaps, and other representatives of important participants. I felt like everyone was on pins and needles, and probably a little unduly so, and, you know, sort of ready to say yes to whatever the family wanted. I didn't, I didn't feel like we were going to have any difficulties over that, even though I wanted to make sure things went smoothly. And, in fact, they did. [chuckling] You went into meetings like that with some apprehension, as I've said, and I can certainly remember that feeling, and everyone else had it, too. [chuckling] Because when Margaret made a decision, you knew it was going to be the way she wanted it—and she

was like her mother that way, I'm sure—but everything worked out just fine.

About Mrs. Truman and the church, which you asked me just a second ago. I don't know a lot about her reasons for becoming an Episcopalian. Involvement of her brother in the choir had something to do with it, and I know she simply preferred the liturgical form of worship as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. And she, once she'd made the decision to be an Episcopalian, she was a good one and a lifelong one.

DUNAR: Her conversion was right about the time of her father's death, wasn't it?

HART: Oh, how old was she when he . . .

DUNAR: I think she was eighteen when he died.

HART: Is that right? I thought she was a little younger than that, but I can't remember now from the book.

SHAVER: Well, at least what I picked up, there was a disagreement in the Presbyterian church over a preacher, and apparently her mother may . . . She may have essentially beat her mother to the Episcopal church. We don't know if they all more or less went at one time or not. Her grandmother was Episcopalian. She married a Presbyterian and they all went to the Presbyterian church for a while. But there was some factional problem at the church. And also, I think . . .

HART: That could be, you know, that could be.

SHAVER: . . . the preacher apparently had a wide appeal to the young people at the time. That's the other thing that I've . . .

HART: Yes, and I can't remember who was rector at that time, but it was way back in

the . . . We could look that up in the records. But [it was] a long time ago. Yes, the reasons people make a switch like that often have to do . . . Well, if there's a conflict in their church where they have been attending, they'll start looking around. And if her brother was involved in the choir, then she probably didn't look very far. Went down the block. And if there was a family connection going way back, that probably appealed to her as well.

SHAVER: Another really curious question which we are dealing with ramifications today: was there a tradition where the altar flowers were taken to her home on occasions?

HART: Yes, there were. In fact, during the time I was rector, they were still occasionally sent to her home.

SHAVER: Because we manage a rather large collection of flower baskets now. [laughter] And somebody had told us that they were coming from the church after a funeral or after services.

HART: Services on Sunday or . . . Yes, we did occasionally send . . . The lady who used to take those over, I will think about that and tell you who that was. But, yes, we did take flowers. Have to deliver them to the Secret Service, or somebody like that, and they would take them over. [chuckling] I'm sorry you have all those. I'm sure they're of no historical value.

SHAVER: They're a great source of amusement for me.

HART: Yes.

SHAVER: And I guess one last thing. Do you remember some of the murder mystery titles that she gave you?

HART: Well, one of the English ones was *Quiet as a Nun* by Antonia Fraser. And there's another one which, if you really want to know, I'll look it up. I keep it in a drawer because it's a paperback that's getting kind of yellow, and I keep it wrapped up in a drawer for safekeeping.

SHAVER: Or any authors that you remember either seeing in the pile which you might have at home?

HART: Yes, I'll have to think about that. I could check on that and see. Did all of those get sort of disposed of?

SHAVER: Some of them did. There were a lot in the study that went to Goodwill, but there are some upstairs and some downstairs near her bed that are still there.

HART: Well, she read a lot of them, I'll tell you that.

DUNAR: Were there other reading interests she had that came up in your conversations at all?

HART: Well, there were occasionally other books, which I don't remember, around, but I don't know whether she read them or whether people sent them to her. I have a feeling that some of those were just sent to her by friends and all.

DUNAR: I asked you just before the tape about any other members of the Truman's official family that kept in touch with her, other than [unintelligible].

HART: I really am not sure. I think I probably assumed that a fair number of them did, but I don't have any firsthand evidence because I just don't have any way of knowing.

DUNAR: Do you have anything else, Mike? Okay, well, thank you very much. We certainly appreciate your time.

HART: Well, you're welcome. I enjoyed it very much. I was glad to be asked.  
[chuckling] Soon there won't be many of us.

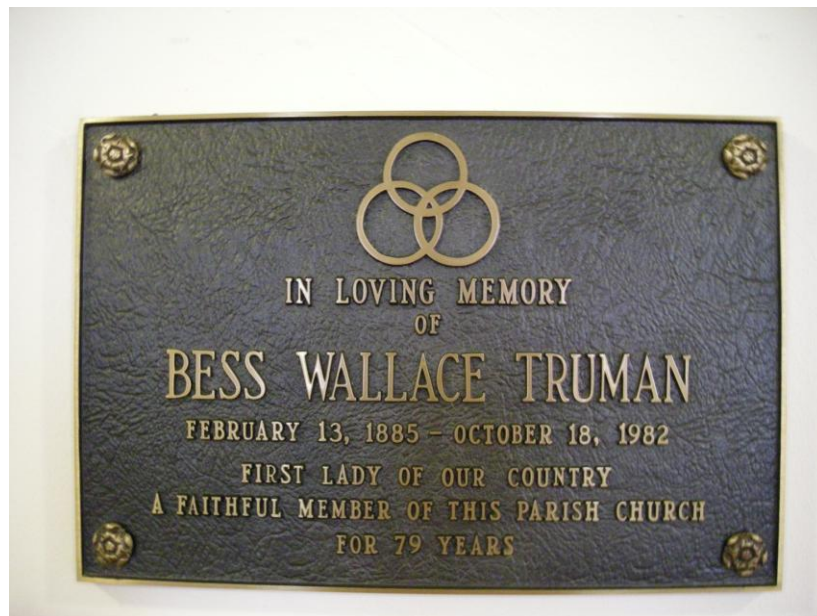
END OF INTERVIEW

## APPENDIX

1. View of the Truman home living room in 1982 (National Park Service photo from the Historic American Buildings Survey, photograph MO-1175-081).



2. Memorial plaque to Bess W. Truman in Trinity Episcopal Church (NPS photo)





3. The Truman “Jack Benny” television set at Trinity Episcopal Church  
A note on top of the console reads: “State of the art for its time was purchased locally for the Truman Family by Jack Benny. The Trumans donated it to the Church. When presented to the First Family it contained many record albums. Some of these are in the display case.” (NPS photo on 3/6/2012)



4. "Pastor pays special attention to spiritual needs," *The Examiner* (Independence, Mo.), Oct. 18, 1982.

## Pastor pays special attention to spiritual needs

"I remember I was nervous," the Rev. Robert L. Hart, pastor of Trinity Episcopal Church, said, recalling the first time he met Bess Truman.

That was in 1978, when Hart first came to Trinity. He had gone to the Truman home to give communion to the former president's widow, as he has done at regular intervals ever since.

"I'd never met a former first lady before," he said slowly, thinking back about the meeting as he talked. "I didn't know what to expect, really. She was already into her 90s then."

But Hart soon found his nervousness leaving him.

"She was sitting in the living room, in her chair," he said, "very bright eyed and gracious. I remember she was frail-looking but not sickly. She invited me to look around the house, and at Mr. Truman's library."

Since that time, Hart, red-haired and thirtyish, has continued to take communion to Mrs. Truman at her home. After being active in the church since joining at age 18, Mrs. Truman quit attending services about 10 years ago because of her advanced age, the pastor said.

"I always found her to be very charming, a very nice person," Hart said. "Her mind was clear, her memory good, she had a good sense of humor. All the good things that people have said about her are true. She was intelligent, witty, a remarkable woman. No one has ever said anything derogatory about her."

He said that Mrs. Truman, "up until

### Strong character and sense of humor endure

the past year or so," had maintained considerable interest in public affairs. "And she had opinions, both good and bad, about public figures. She wasn't afraid to express them, either. She was not a shrinking violet. If people ever thought that, they were mistaken. She was outgoing in her own way. She was a good conversationalist."

Hart remembered that Margaret Truman Daniel had once said of her mother, "She's the biggest mystery person in the family."

When Alice Roosevelt Longworth, a noted Washington figure and wit, died, Mrs. Truman recalled to Hart a dinner party in the nation's capital shortly after FDR's death had elevated Harry Truman to the presidency. She found herself sitting next to Mrs. Longworth, who leaned over to her and said, "Thank God, you're not Eleanor."

But when asked about how Mrs. Truman felt about Mrs. Longworth's comment, Hart said, "It was hard to tell. I'm really not sure. She certainly didn't laugh. She just seemed to relate it as an anecdote."

Usually, though, she never talked about the White House years, "unless I asked her about them," Hart said.

The pastor usually went to the Truman home on Thursdays. The appointments were for 3 p.m., but Hart said he always arrived at 2:55.

Once, a mistake in the appointment day — arranged through the housekeeper — had him arriving on Saturday instead of Thursday. But

instead of annoying Mrs. Truman, the mixup apparently served only to bring out Mrs. Truman's sense of humor.

She had looked for him on Thursday.

"When I talked to her about it," Father Hart said, "she told me, 'Well, when it got to be five minutes to three and you weren't here, I knew you weren't coming.'"

"She had a subtle sense of humor that you could miss if you didn't watch for it. Her eyes would light up when she was joking. There would be a sparkle in her eyes."

Hart said his visits usually lasted about an hour.

"I would ask her a few questions," he said, "then would let her tell me anything she wanted to. Then we would have the communion, and then a little more conversation."

His visits usually turned out to be about a month apart, he said, "depending on the time of year. I always waited awhile after holidays, such as Christmas or Truman Day, to go — at a time when there was no one visiting and when things had calmed down."

Hart said Mrs. Truman especially enjoyed having him bring his wife, Becky, with him on the visits. "In fact, she seemed to prefer it that way."

One change Hart said he had noted in the former first lady since he began visiting her was that her speech had slowed.

"Not that her mind wasn't working," he said. "It just seemed that she couldn't speak quickly, but it had been getting better just before she broke her hip."

According to records at Trinity Episcopal Church, Mrs. Truman became a member through the sacramental rite of confirmation May 8, 1903 — the birthday of her future husband.

The bishop confirming her was the Right Rev. Edward R. Atwill, Bishop of West Missouri. The rector of Trinity at that time was the Rev. Mr. R. R. Diggs. Mrs. Truman was 18 when she was confirmed. Frank Gates Wallace, her brother, was confirmed the same day.

Bess Wallace married Harry Truman at the church on June 28, 1919, with the Rev. Mr. John V. Plunkett officiating. The parish records list Theodore Marks, Louise Wells and Helen Wallace as the witnesses.

Mrs. Truman was one of the founding members of the church's Altar Guild.

On April 21, 1956, Margaret Truman married Clifton Daniel at Trinity.

Although there might be complexities about the former first lady, Father Hart said there was at least "one thing" he was certain of. "She really loved Harry Truman."

"That was evident in everything she has ever said. She always asked me to say a prayer for him. She always spoke very warmly of him and genuinely missed him. The house itself is full of him. When you're there, you feel like he will walk around the corner any minute."

5. Hart, "She liked to remember Mr. Truman in prayer," *The Examiner* (Independence, Mo.), Oct. 19, 1982.

## 'She liked to remember Mr. Truman in prayer'

By The Rev. Robert L. Hart

I first met Mrs. Truman in 1977 just after I became rector of Trinity Episcopal Church. Naturally I was a little nervous about meeting a former first lady. So many people in the parish, however, just knew her as Bess. Many of them had known her for years and a few had grown up with her. Their reassurances were helpful. I knew I would be meeting a gracious but down-to-earth lady. This is indeed how I found her to be.

Mrs. Truman had been house-bound for a number of years. It was my privilege as her pastor and priest to visit her on a regular basis. Apart from ordinary pastoral calls, I also brought her holy communion at least six times a year. She always liked at every visit to have a time of prayer and especially to remember Mr. Truman in prayer.

There are a number of things about Mrs. Truman I'll always remember. One is her love of reading and in particular her enjoyment of murder

mysteries — an addiction I also share. She gave me at least two murder mysteries she had read and liked.

Another facet of Mrs. Truman which I treasure and is well known to those who were acquainted with her was her intelligence and wit. She always had a quick comeback in conversation, and her humor was subtle and incisive.

Mrs. Truman was an intelligent, kind, genteel woman. It was a great honor to be her pastor and friend.